THE INVINCIBLE

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J. Calafiore '95

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HAVOCRACK

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J. Calafiore '95

"Trust no future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead past bury its dead!
Act, act in the living present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!
Longfellow, *A Psalm of Life*."

THE PACIFIC COAST, THE PRESENT DAY...

THIS IS THE HOUSE THAT TONY STARK BUILT...

A TEENAGER REBORN INTO A MAN'S WORLD — IRON MAN'S WORLD — YOUNG *TONY STARK* BOLDLY FACES HIS UNCERTAIN *FUTURE* ONE STEP AT A TIME. WITH HEART DAMAGED AND SOUL SHAKEN BY THE KNOWLEDGE OF TOMORROW'S DARK POSSIBILITIES, TONY'S GREATEST ASSET — AND ONLY HOPE — REMAINS HIS *BRILLIANT MIND*. . .

...AND THIS IS TONY STARK!

AAAA-MAZING!

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I REMEMBER ONE DAY, WAY BACK, I ASKED TONY WHAT DROVE HIM TO WORK SO **HARD** ALL THE TIME...

"**WONDER**," HE SAID.

THE MAN WHO SINGLE-HANDEDLY **DEFINED** THE TECHNOLOGY OF OUR AGE WAS FIRED BY AN INNOCENT, CHILDLIKE **AWE** AT THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE UNIVERSE AROUND HIM...

HE TOLD ME ABOUT THE KICK HE GOT OUT OF CUTTING LOOSE IN A FULLY STOCKED LAB. ABOUT THE HOURS THAT WOULD SLIP AWAY **UNNOTICED** AS HE WRESTLED WITH A NEW IDEA...

ABOUT THE BUZZ OF TAKING A CONCEPT FURTHER AND **FASTER** THAN ANYONE HAD DARED BEFORE. ABOUT THE EUPHORIC MOMENT WHEN HE KNEW--JUST **KNEW**--HE'D GOT IT **RIGHT**.

HE TOLD ME ABOUT HIS **HEROES**... NEWTON AND EDISON, BABBAGE AND RIEMANN, FARADAY AND LEONARDO.

AND THE OTHERS, THE **VISIONARIES** WHO LOOKED TO THE FUTURE... WELLS, GERNSBACK, CAMPBELL, ASIMOV AND CLARKE...WITH THEIR TIME MACHINES AND FLYING WINGS AND METAL MEN AND ROCKET SHIPS...

"THE **FUTURE**--", HE SAID, LOOKING DOWN AT HIS OPEN HANDS, "--BEGINS **HERE**."

STAN LEE PRESENTS THE BIGGEST IRON MAN STORY EVER TOLD--

FACE TO FACE

THIS PLACE IS **AMAZING!**

AND NOW, YEARS LATER, HERE'S A **YOUNG** TONY STARK AGAIN, A TONY STARK WHOSE FUTURE IS LAID OUT IN GRAND **POSSIBILITIES** BEFORE HIM.

AND I CAN SEE THE **WONDER** IN HIS EYES!

TERRY KAVANAGH
PLOT

DAN ABNETT
SCRIPT

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LIKE A KID IN A CANDY STORE...

...HE'S INTO **EVERY-THING**. HE DOESN'T KNOW **WHAT** TO PLAY WITH NEXT!

I CAN BARELY KEEP TRACK OF HIM. HE'S LOOKING AT THIS, FIDDLING WITH THAT. HE ONLY SEEMS TO PAUSE LONG ENOUGH TO **WHISTLE** NOW AND THEN.

THOSE LONG, SLOW, HEARTFELT WHISTLES OF **AWE**.

THEN HE'S OFF AGAIN, PROBING, TUGGING, SCREWING AROUND WITH STUFF...

NO, SCRATCH THAT. HE'S NOT SCREWING **AROUND** WITH **ANYTHING**.

THAT LAB'S FULL OF HARD-WARE THAT'S **YEARS** AHEAD OF THE TECH-NOLOGY HE KNOWS. BUT HE DOESN'T HESITATE.

TRIAL AND ERROR. HE WORKS AND LEARNS. CALCULATED GUESS. TENACIOUS RISK. COMMON SENSE. IT COMES TOGETHER.

HE MAY NOT KNOW JUST WHAT IT ALL DOES, OR **HOW** IT DOES IT... BUT HE KNOWS WHERE IT'S **COME** FROM AND HOW IT MIGHT'VE **GOTTEN** HERE, AND HE'S FILLING IN THE REST **HIMSELF**.

GUESS THAT'S WHAT MAKES HIM A **GENIUS**.

IF ANYONE CAN EXPLORE THE **COLD HEART** OF STARK TECHNOLOGY AND LEARN THE SECRETS OF TONY STARK...

...IT'S TONY STARK **HIMSELF.**

AT LEAST THAT'S THE **THEORY.**

A FEW HOURS AGO,* THE AVENGERS BROUGHT THIS NINETEEN YEAR OLD TONY STARK BACK FROM A DISINTEGRATING PAST TO THE HERE AND NOW...

...SO THAT HE MIGHT GIVE US THE **EDGE** IN OUR FIGHT AGAINST... **TONY STARK.**

MAN. I USED TO **HATE** IT WHEN THEY PULLED THIS MIRROR-DOUBLE STUNT IN OLD **STAR TREKS.** NOW I'M **LIVING IT!**

BEAM ME UP, SOME-ONE, FER PETE'S SAKE!

*IN AVENGERS: TIMESLIDE.--Nel

HAWKEYE!

THANKS.

HOW'S THE YOUNG PRETENDER DOING?

THERE AIN'T NOTHING PRETEND ABOUT HIM, MASQUE. DON'T FORGET THAT.

THAT KID DOWN THERE'S TONY STARK.

•Yeah. THE TWO AND ONLY.

SO HAS HE CRACKED IT YET?

INTO THE DATABASE NOW. GIVEN TIME, HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND ENOUGH OF WHAT OUR TONY LEFT THERE TO GIVE US THE INFO THAT WE NEED.

BUT TIME IS NOT ON OUR SIDE--IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.

TELL ME ABOUT IT.

LET'S PRAY THE BOY WONDER IS A QUICK STUDY...

FAR OFF...

...ANOTHER ANTHONY STARK SITS ALONE AND LISTENS TO THE SILENCE.

NEVER IN HIS LIFE HAS HE FELT SO WEARY.

HE BUILT THIS AUTOMATED ARCTIC BUNKER FOR THE SAME REASON HE BUILT ARMORS... TO KEEP THE WORLD AT BAY.

HIS HANDS, HIS MIND, HIS TOOLS... AND THE WONDER OF INVENTION, THAT VIVID SPARK...

...THESE WERE THE ONLY COMPANIONS THAT HE NEEDED. HE WAS HAPPY TO SHUT HIMSELF AWAY, TO LOCK THE DOOR ON HIS STERILE AND INVINCIBLE SHELL AGAINST THE HUMAN WARMTH OUTSIDE, AND CONTENT HIMSELF WITH THE CHALLENGE OF THE LABORATORY.

IT WAS WHAT HE LIVED FOR...

BUT SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY, SOMETIME WHEN HIS BACK WAS TURNED, THE WONDER FADED.

NOW HE IS ALONE AND TIRED.

AND IT'S AS COLD IN HERE AS IT IS OUTSIDE...

ANOTHER NOW...

ANOTHER HOUSE...

...THE HOUSE OF KANG.

...SO YOU SEE, MALACHI, MY BEST BELOVED...

...THE LAND CALLED VIETNAM WAS WHERE I WAS BORN AND RAISED.

IT SEEMS SO LONG AGO, MY SON, SO FAR AWAY...A FRAGILE DREAM YOUR FATHER WOKE ME FROM.

AND FOR THAT, I THANK HIM.

HE TOOK ME FROM A DULL AND PRIMITIVE LIFE, FREED ME FROM THE CRUEL SHACKLES OF A SPIRITUALITY THAT CHAFED LIKE A NOOSE AROUND MY THROAT...

...AND SHOWED ME THE FUTURE.

HOW COULD I NOT LOVE A MAN WHO WIELDED IN HIS FISTS THE WHITE HEAT OF TECHNOLOGY AND THE BLUE FLAME OF TIME ITSELF...

...AND WHO USED THOSE FISTS TO HAMMER OUT A SHINING DESTINY?

MANTIS... MOTHER... HOW DID YOU MEET HIM?

HOW DID YOU MEET KANG?

"YEARS AGO, HE WAS IN CONFLICT WITH THE ONES KNOWN AS THE *AVENGERS.*

"FOOLISHLY--I WAS *VERY* YOUNG THEN--I HAD MISTAKEN THE AVENGERS AS *FRIENDS.*

"I THINK I REALIZED MY ERROR THE MOMENT I BEHELD KANG."

YAAAAGHH!

TEN AGAINST TWO! AND *STILL* YOU TEETER AND FALL!

AS YOU COMMAND, CONQUEROR! WE WILL GIVE YOU NO QUARTER!

GOOD! GOOD!

DO YOUR *WORST,* ANACHRONAUTS, FOR TOBIAS AND I...

HAVE YOU NO *SPINE,* MY ANACHRONAUTS?! I CHARGE YOU... *HOLD NOTHING BACK!*

MY SON AND I WANT TO BE *TESTED,* NOT...DIS-*TRACTED!*

...WILL MATCH IT BLOW FOR BLOW, AND BLOOD FOR BLOOD!

MY BROTHER AND I HAVE BEEN BRED TO RULE *TIME*, MOTHER...

...HOW CAN WE DETERMINE THE *FUTURE*, IF WE DO NOT KNOW WHERE IT HAS *BEEN*?

WHY DO YOU ASK SUCH QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PAST, MALACHI?

"FREE YOUR MIND, MALACHI! SUCH THOUGHTS ARE TOO *LINEAR* FOR ONE WHO HAS THE WEFT OF FUTURITY AT HIS FINGERTIPS!"

YOU MUST THINK ONLY OF A *NOW*, THAT DECISIVE MOMENT WHERE POSSIBILITY AND EXPECTATION ARE BOUND TOGETHER, AND WHERE CAUSE AND EFFECT BECOME AS ONE.

BUT IT'S SO *HARD* TO BE *OUTSIDE* OF TIME, TO PEER IN, TO DETERMINE THE COURSE OF LIFE AND DEATH...

"...AS ABSTRACTIONS."

WHAM!

YOU PRESENT WELL, TOBIAS. YOUR PARRIES ARE SKILLED, IF A LITTLE *OBVIOUS*.

YOUR THRUSTS ARE *CRUDE*, BUT THAT CAN BE WORKED ON.

BE *ALERT*. ALTER YOUR TACTICS MID-BOUT. KEEP THE FOE *GUESSING* HIS WAY TO A *WRETCHED* DEATH.

THWOW!

AIGHH!

YOU ARE SCION OF A *MOST REGAL* HOUSE, TOBIAS... SIRED OF THE LINEAGE OF KANG, HEIR TO AN *ETERNAL* EMPIRE!

YOU CANNOT AFFORD TO BE *GOOD*...

...YOU MUST BE *UN-PARALLELED*.

AGHHKKK!

AND YOU WERE *NOT* SO YESTERDAY WHEN YOU ALLOWED THE *AVENGERS* TO RE-TRIEVE THE JUVENILE STARK FROM THE TIME CORRIDOR!*

*AS SEEN IN AVENGERS: TIMESLIDE.
--NEL

YOU *DISAPPOINT* ME, WHELP.

YOU, YOUR BROTHER, AND NEUT *FAILED* ME *DISMALLY*.

DO NOT MAKE ME *REPEAT* THIS LESSON. TRADITIONALLY, ONLY *ONE* SHOULD LEAVE THE COMBAT FIELD ALIVE.

AND NEXT TIME, I WILL OB-*SERVE* TRADITION.

"THE HOUR OF OUR *GREATEST THREAT* IS UPON US, TOBIAS. THE MOST TERRIBLE FOE OF *ALL* STANDS AT OUR GATES.

"HE HAS BEATEN US BACK ALONG THE STANCHIONS OF TIME, AND FORCED US TO MAKE OUR STAND HERE, *NOW*, IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY OF THIS PLANET'S HISTORY.

"ALL OF OUR EFFORTS, ALL OF OUR STRATEGIES, HAVE BEEN TO MAKE THIS *MOMENT* OUR *BEACH-HEAD*. STARK, OUR PAWN, HAS SET THE FINAL PIECES IN PLACE...

"...ACTIVATING THE CHRONOGRAPHIC WEAPON THAT WILL *CAUTERIZE* THE TIMELINE HERE. HUMAN CULTURE WILL BE RAZED AND SET ASIDE, REALITY WILL BE WIPED, POLLUTANTS SUCH AS *FATE* AND *CHANCE* WILL CEASE TO BE...

"...AND THOSE HUMANS THAT SURVIVE WILL BE *TRANSMUTED* INTO A HOST OF *ANACHRONAUTS* FOR THE GREAT WAR THAT IS TO COME.

"THIS IS THE HOUR, TOBIAS, THIS IS THE MOMENT. THE WORLD WILL BECOME OUR *FORTRESS*, THE HUMAN DETRITUS OUR *LEGIONS*...

"...THE *FUTURE* BEGINS HERE.

"AND I WILL WASH MY HANDS IN THE STEAMING BLOOD OF *ANYONE* WHO IS NOT *STRONG* ENOUGH TO FACE IT AT MY SIDE!"

MOTHER, WHAT'S TH--

--OWW!

MOTHER?

MOTHER?

MANTIS DOES NOT HEED HER SON. SHE FEELS A CHILL IN HER SOUL, LIKE...

...WHAT IS THAT OLD, HUMAN EXPRESSION AGAIN?

"LIKE SOMEONE HAD WALKED ACROSS HER GRAVE."

THERE IS SO MUCH THAT SHE HAS NOT TOLD HER SON, SO MUCH SHE CANNOT TELL.

SHE WAS THE CELESTIAL MADONNA, THE STARS ABOVE WERE HER BIRTHRIGHT.

BUT IT WAS TAKEN FROM HER, STOLEN. AND THE AVENGERS, WHO CLAIMED TO BE HER FRIEND, DID NOTHING.

SHE TURNED TO KANG, WHO TOOK HER AS HIS CONSORT. THIS IS HER BIRTH-RIGHT NOW... THE KINGDOM OF KANG, LAST BEACHHEAD AGAINST THE ONE WHO COMES...

...THE DARK ONE. THE GREAT FOE STALKING BACK THROUGH THE VAULTS OF TIME, LEAVING THE FUTURE BLAZING IN HIS WAKE...

...COMING FOR THEM.

COMING FOR THEM ALL.

THE SECRET DOOR OPENS AT HER TOUCH. SENSORS RECOGNIZE HER AND ACTIVATE THE TEMPORTAL IN ITS FRAME...

...AND SHE STEPS THROUGH INTO A FRIGID, FRIENDLESS ARCTIC BUNKER FAR AWAY FROM THE CITIDEL OF KANG.

ANTHONY?

MANTIS.

WHY HAVE YOU COME?

I SENSED YOUR LONELINESS, ANTHONY. YOUR PAIN.

IT MATCHES MINE.

WE ARE BOTH CASUALTIES OF THIS WAR. WE HAVE BOTH SUFFERED.

WE ARE MORE ALIKE THAN YOU CAN POSSI-BLY IMAGINE.

NO ONE CAN TAKE THIS PAIN FROM ME, MANTIS.

TELL ME, ANTHONY...

...HAS ANY-ONE EVER, TRULY TRIED?

NEW YORK...

...ANOTHER HOUSE.

AVENGERS MANSION, ITS WOUNDS FRESH, SITS DARK AND SILENT AS THE DAWN COMES UP. *

* THE AVENGERS LAID SIEGE TO IT IN TIMESLIDE. --NEL

BUT IN THE BASEMENT, WHERE THE NOTORIOUS MYSTERY DOOR ONCE STOOD, SOME PEOPLE HAVE BEEN UP FOR HOURS...

...NADA! ACCORDING TO THE HAND-SENSOR READINGS, THERE'S NOTHING THERE, AND THERE NEVER WAS!

A VERDICT WITH WHICH I CONCUR, HANK. NO MATTER HOW DEEP I PROBE INTO THE FABRIC OF THE WALL, I CAN SENSE NO TRACE OF THE PORTAL THAT ONCE EXISTED HERE.

THE WALL HAS RETURNED...TO NORMAL.

THOUGH I HATE TO USE SUCH A SUBJECTIVE WORD.

I'LL LET IT PASS, VISION, JUST THIS ONCE.

I GUESS WE CAN FORGET USING THE DOOR TO REACH TONY AND HIS CRONIES, KANG AND MANTIS...

PERHAPS MANIPULATORS WOULD BE A BETTER DESCRIPTION.

PERHAPS.

SEE HOW THEY'RE DOING UP-STAIRS, HUH? MAYBE THEY'VE HEARD FROM HAWK AND MASQUE OUT ON THE WEST COAST.

WE COULD DO WITH JUNIOR COMING THROUGH FOR US ABOUT NOW.

VISION!

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR GOOD NEWS, FELLA, FORGET IT!

HERCULES, WASP, AND I ARE CHECKING THE DEBRIS PIECE BY PIECE. THERE'S NOT EVEN A HINT OF USEFUL DATA.

...HANK PYM AND I CANNOT DETECT ANY REMNANT OF THE DOOR AND--

OHH! QUICKSILVER!

NOT NOW, NATASHA--!

IT IS THE SAME IN THE BASEMENT, BLACK WIDOW...

I'M TIRED OF RUNNING, CRYS. FOUR SWEEPS OF THE HOUSE AND I'VE FOUND NOTHING.

FUNNY HOW...

...LUNA'S BEDROOM'S ALMOST UNTOUCHED.

I CAN SMELL HER ON THIS PILLOW.

I-I KNOW WE SHOULD PUT OUR TRUST IN TUC TO LOOK AFTER HER... B-BUT SEEING LUNA'S OLDER SELF DIE...

OH, PIET.

CRYS...

I DON'T MEAN TO INTERRUPT...

WHA--?

...I'VE JUST GOT WORD FROM *HAWKEYE*. THEY'VE FOUND US A LEAD. WE'RE GOING TO MOVE AGAINST STARK'S ARCTIC BUNKER.

LET'S ASSEMBLE AT THE QUINJETS. HURRY...

MOMENTS LATER...

IT WOULD APPEAR OUR DEPARTURE IS TO BE *DELAYED*.

I DON'T *BELIEVE* THIS...!

GYRICH!

IXNAY ON THE AMSCRAY, AVENGERS. YOU'RE NOT GOING ANY-WHERE.

AND THIS CONTINGENT OF *MANDROIDS* IS HERE TO MAKE THAT THREAT A *PROMISE*.

THE BUNKER.

IMPREGNABLE. FORBIDDING. UNASSAILABLE. EVEN THE KNIFE-SHARP ARCTIC WIND CAN'T GET IN. IT MERELY SCOURS ITS METAL BULK AND HOWLS AWAY INTO THE ENDLESS NIGHT.

OUT OF WHICH, A LONE FIGURE WALKS.

THE BUNKER IS IN BATTLE-READY MODE, BRISTLING WITH ANXIOUS WEAPON-SPINES AND LASER ARRAYS.

WATCH-DOG SCANNERS BLINK OUT INTO THE STORM AND NOTE THE APPROACHING FIGURE. THE WEAPONS TRAVERSE AND TARGET.

ANTHONY STARK.

AUTHORIZATION: MALORY.

FZZZK!

KK-THOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMM

IN ANOTHER INSTANT, THE INTRUDER WILL BE A RAPIDLY COOLING STREAK OF BUBBLING SLURRY ON THE SUB-ZERO GROUND...

...UNLESS HE IS IDENTIFIED.

AND THE SECURITY MONITOR IS LETHALLY CHOOSY ABOUT WHO IT LETS IN.

I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU PULLED THAT, BUT--

--NO! NO!

HOW CAN YOU BE?

STARK, YOU AMATEUR...!

...HIT THE DECK!

EVEN AN OLD FUSEBOX LIKE *MACHINESMITH* CAN ONLY GAWK IN AMAZEMENT SO LONG!

THAM! THAM! THAM! THOOM

THANK-FULLY, HE'S A LOUSY SHOT... WHEREAS...

TZZZZZKKKK!

ZZZZZZ-

AAAAKK-

THOOM!

YIIGGG!

MASQUE! THE AUTO-DEFENSES HAVE GONE INTO ALERT! THEY'RE TRAINING BACK ON US!

HAWKEYE! WE NEED YOUR DIVERSION!..

"...NOW!"

THE FORCE WORKS HEX SHIP BURSTS FROM THE SNOWBANK THAT CONCEALED IT, FLYING ON AUTOMATIC AS ITS PILOT LEAPS CLEAR...

...A MUCH MORE CONSIDERABLE THREAT TO OCCUPY THE AUTO-DEFENSES...

HAWKEYE! THIS WAY! MOVE!

SHEESH! A PUNK KID--AND HE'S ALREADY GIVING ME ORDERS!

ABOVE, THE HEX SHIP PULLS HARD ON A FINAL APPROACH, GUNS THUMPING...

...AND BLINDS THE BUNKER'S SENSORS WITH ITS FIERY DEMISE...

KA WHOOM!

BY THE TIME THE ICESTORM BOILS THE SMOKE AWAY...

...THE BUNKER DOORS HAVE CLOSED AGAIN, AND THERE'S NO ONE TO BE SEEN.

...WHY WON'T YOU LISTEN TO *REASON*, MAN?

REASON? THAT WOULD BE A NOVELTY...

...YOUR KIND *COMMUNICATES* WITH FISTS, YOUR PETTY BRAWLS LEVEL BLOCKS OF THIS FAIR CITY...

...AND THEN YOU TALK TO ME ABOUT *REASON*?

I AM UNDER ORDERS FROM THE *STATE DEPARTMENT* TO DETAIN THE AVENGERS ON THESE PREMISES UNTIL THE *ALTERCATION* THAT TORE THROUGH NEW YORK YESTERDAY CAN BE *FULLY INVESTIGATED.*

DO YOU READ ME, CAPTAIN? IS THAT ENOUGH *REASON* FOR YOU? OR, GIVEN YOUR *ACTIVITIES* LATELY, WOULD YOU FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE WITH A "T" IN FRONT OF THAT WORD?

GYRICH, YOU LITTLE SNAKE...!

THIS PLACE IS HUGE.

YOU HAVEN'T SEEN THE *HALF* OF IT.

IT SEEMS BIGGER ON THE *INSIDE*... LIKE A *TESSERACT*...

EASY ON THE SCIENCE STUFF, KID. MASQUE, SEE IF YOU CAN FIND MARIANNE ...

...ME AND *JUNIOR* HERE WILL LOOK FOR THE MAN HIMSELF.

SHOULDN'T WE HAVE WAITED FOR THE *AVENGERS*?

WE'RE ON A CLOCK HERE, KID.

KID?

OH, BOY.

THIS IS... *AMAZING*.

THEY'RE *WONDERFUL*, HAWKEYE!

AND I USED TO THINK A SPARE PAIR OF PANTS WAS AN EXTRAVAGANCE...

ZZZTTTAAKKK!

AGHHH!

WHOAA! BEHIND US!

NOW! GRAB YOUR BOW, HAWKEYE! NOW!

DO AS RODGERS SAYS, HAWK! I MANAGED TO-OVERRIDE HER INHIBITOR WITH THIS GIZMO, BUT HER TELEKINETIC ASSAULT WON'T KEEP STARK OFF BALANCE LONG!

OKAY, MASQUE, I--

--BLAST!

TZZAKK

NO MORE CHANCES, CLINT. YOUR LITTLE TASK FORCE HAS--

DON'T EXPOSE YOUR BACK TO ME, STARK!

UGHN!

KRATCH!

THAT HURT, MARI-ANNE...

HE'S DOWN! GRAB HIM!

...JUST WAVE. AFTER WAVE OF MANDROIDS!

TZZZZAAKKK!

HEY, GUYS!

DO YOUR BEST, HERC, WE--

THAT'S CENTURY'S TELEPORT SIGNATURE!

BACK FROM THE TIME-STREAM, MY FRIEND?*

AND NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON, CAPTAIN.

I'M JUST GUESSING... BUT DO YOU PEOPLE NEED A LIFT OUT OF HERE?

LIKE YESTERDAY, CENTURY!

* SEE TIMESLIDE!

TCHA-

THOOOOM!

AGHHK!

UGHN!

OFF ME!

UNFF!

I TAKE NO PLEASURE IN ANY OF THIS...

...WE WERE ALL FRIENDS AT ONE TIME.

BUT THAT'S ALL BEHIND US NOW--

--AGGHH!

MY ARMOR...?

NOBODY CAN BYPASS THE SECURITY LOCK-OUTS OF MY SUITS...

...WHO THE BLAZES ARE YOU?

I'M THE NOBODY YOU WERE TALKIN' 'BOUT.

IRON MAN DOESN'T RESPOND TO THE IMPETUOUS REPLY...

...THERE IS NO TIME FOR SOLVING RIDDLES.

KA-THOOOOOM!!!

HE DRIVES THE USURPER BACK THROUGH THE BULK-HEAD INTO THE FABRICATION LAB...

...TEARING WITH BERSERK FURY AT HIS *STOLEN* SUIT.

KRAKOOOOM!

THOOOM!

INTERNAL GYROSCOPES HELP HIM TO RECOVER IN MID-AIR...

...AND BOOT JETS THROW HIM BACK...

...INTO A *STINGING* PUNCH.

HOW DID--?

GRAVIMETRIC STABILIZERS.

WISE UP...

...YOU'RE OUT-CLASSED.

GUUH!

THE VISOR CRACKS...

...AND THE USURPER IS HURLED THROUGH ANOTHER WALL.

N-NO...!

THE DEFENSE COMMAND CENTER.

THE VIEWER *REVEALS* ARRIVAL OUTSIDE OF THE *AVENGERS*.

ANTHONY STARK DOESN'T NOTICE...

...AS HE FIRES A *HEAT-BLAST* AND FUSES THE LEGS OF HIS RIVAL'S ARMOR TOGETHER.

MAGNETICALLY LIFTING HIS FOE LIKE A BROKEN RAG DOLL...

YOUR FRIENDS ARE PINNED DOWN OUTSIDE. THEY CAN'T GET IN.

USING MY ARMOR AGAINST ME WAS A CANNY MOVE. IT TOOK BRAINS. BUT IT WAS A MISTAKE.

I DETEST THE THEFT AND ABUSE OF MY CREATIONS. THEY ARE MY LIFE'S BLOOD.

BEING IRON MAN DEFINES ME...

SKRAKK!

IT IS ME.

SHUNNK!

ME ALONE. NO ONE CAN TAKE THAT PART.

MISTER...

...NO ONE IN THEIR RIGHT MIND WOULD WANT TO BE YOU.

ENOUGH!

WHO ARE YOU?

ZZZ

DEAR GOD.

YOU!

A YOUNGER YOU...A CLEANER YOU.

IT WAS YOUR IDEA, I THINK, BUT THE AVENGERS PULLED IT OFF.

WRONG...

I UNDERSTAND NOW WHAT THEY WERE DOING. I--

--NO!

SHRA AKKK

THE REPULSOR HOWLS. THE BUNKER CONTROL SYSTEMS SHATTER AND BURN. DEFENSE SYSTEMS FAIL AND GO OFF-LINE.

THOOM-M-M-FF!

IT'S NOT HIS YOUNGER SELF'S *VICTORY* THAT DOES IT.

NOR IS IT THE PROSPECT OF *DEFEAT.*

IT'S THE *LOOK* IN HIS EYES. THE LOOK OF *WONDER.* THE LOOK THAT SAYS "I CAN DO *ANYTHING.*"

THE *INVINCIBLE* LOOK *HE* ONCE WORE...

THAT IS ALL IT TAKES.

DON'T YOU *DARE.*

DON'T YOU *DARE* LOOK AT ME THAT WAY.

FROOM

BACK AWAY FROM THE KID, STARK!

THAT LOOK OF ARROGANCE IS *RESPONSIBLE* FOR WHAT I'VE *BECOME...*

ARCKK,

SKLUT

YOU SHOULD NEVER HAVE LET THEM BRING YOU HERE...

...I WON'T LET MY LIFE HAPPEN AGAIN!

KRAKKA!

THERE.

IT'S FINISHED.

CRYSTAL! FLASH-FREEZE THE KID! GET HIM INTO STASIS!

THE REST OF YOU...

COME AND GET ME.

NO! WAIT! I *WANT* TO STAY! I *WANT* TO BE HERE...

...TAKE HIM!

HE'S *GATING* OUT OF HERE! NOO!

HE'S GONE!

BUT THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE FORMING... SOMETHING *ELSE* COMING THROUGH THE TEMPORTAL...!

GREETINGS, AVENGERS.

SURRENDER. YOU ARE OUT-NUMBERED AND SQUARELY *DEFEATED*.

THE PLANET IS MINE.

AND THE *FUTURE* BEGINS HERE.

TO BE CONCLUDED IN AVENGERS #395!